

Ash in basket work.—In the BOTANICAL GAZETTE, vol. xi, pp. 326-328, is an article on *Hierochloa borealis*, in which the author describes the use of this grass in basket work. Furthermore he says: "The wood

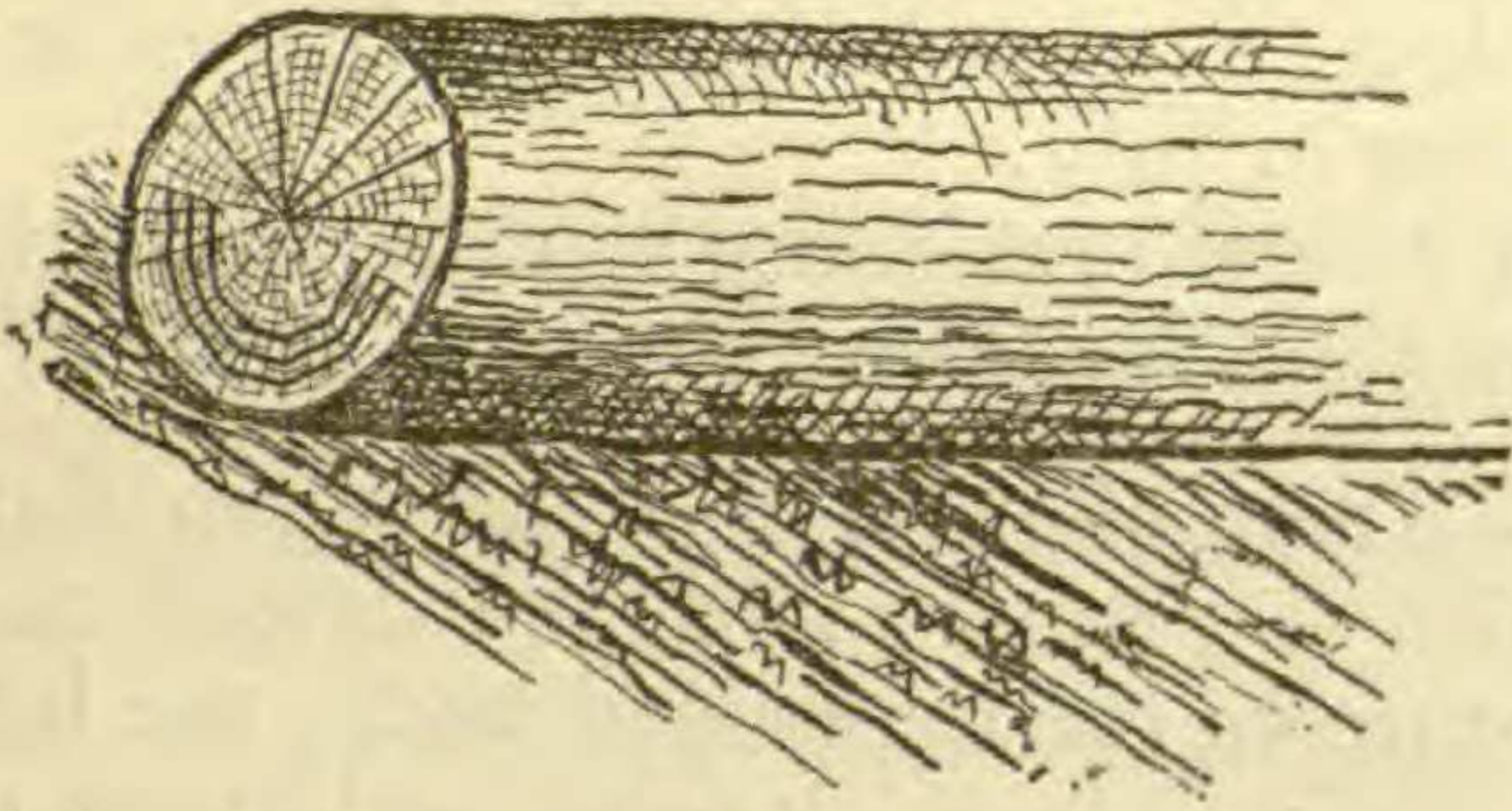


Fig. 1.

used, which forms the main part of these articles, is white ash, *Fraxinus Americana*, and red maple, *Acer rubrum*, called in Maine white maple. These woods they prepare at home, splitting the ash into strips of the requisite thickness and width by means of a machine."

In conversation with an old basket maker, in the eastern part of Yates Township, Orleans County, N. Y., I gleaned the following facts relative to a more primitive method of splitting ash than that by machines. This basket maker first splits the ash log into wedge-shaped pieces as represented in the upper half of figure 1. These pieces are again divided into parts along the cross-lines, as seen in the lower half of figure 1. The pieces now obtained are called "bars. In order to separate the bar into strips suitable for his work, the basket maker places the bar on a block and strikes hard blows upon it with a heavy hammer. The blows fall perpendicular to the layers of growth. This causes the layers of wood to slightly separate, much in the same way as a lad in making a whistle, by pounding for a time, loosens the willow bark. In order to still farther separate the layers, the basket maker causes the end of the bar to project about four or six inches from the pounding block, and strikes more hard blows upon the projecting end. This causes the end of the bar to separate in layers, as figure 2 shows. The strips of layers of growth, or "grains" in the basket makers' terminology, can then be readily pulled apart. These strips vary in thickness and are either trimmed by various gauges or are themselves split

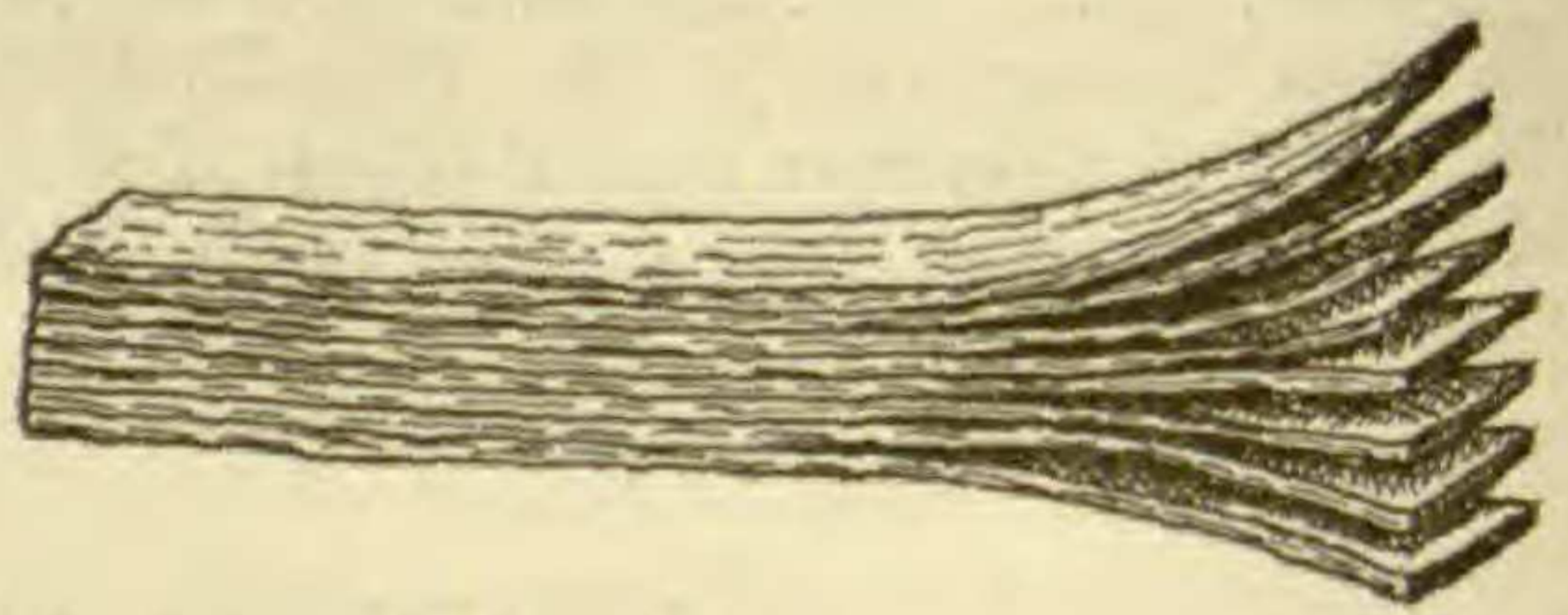


Fig. 2.

by one of two methods. Thus, the edge of the strip having been split by a knife for a distance of six inches, one of the halves is placed on the floor and the basket maker holds it down with his foot, at the same time pulling on the other split portion. Thus it is divided. Or the basket maker grasps the strip with both hands, near one end, and bends it rapidly between them; then he slips his hands up the strip and repeats the bending, etc., until he has reached the end of the strip. This procedure separates the fibres so that the strip is easily made into two. This basket

maker prefers black ash which has been exposed to the wind and sun. The best ash for his purpose is obtained from a wood-lot which is open and dry. Next to this he prefers isolated trees near a forest. He does not use black ash of the "black ash swamps," for, he says, "the grains are too thin and the wood is not as tough."

The structure of the ash determines its mode of splitting under heavy blows. It divides at the lines of demarcation of the annual layers. Here are to be seen, upon microscopic examination, large dotted ducts, whose open mouths are quite evident to the naked eye, in cross section.

The earliest mention of the ash and other trees in this section of Western New York, that I know of, may be found in a handbill issued by Joseph Ellicott, November 26th, 1800, (and quoted in Turner's History of the Holland Purchase), viz: "Those who prefer land timbered with black and white oak, hickory, poplar, chestnut, wild cherry, butternut and dogwood, or the more luxuriant, timbered with basswood, sugar tree, white ash, wild cherry, cucumber tree—a species of magnolia—and black walnut, may be suited."

I am indebted to a botanical friend, Miss L. A. Weld, for the drawings.—CHARLES E. FAIRMAN.

Astringent qualities of Heuchera and Mitella.—It is well known that astringency is a common property in the Saxifrage family, and in the west, *Heuchera hispida* Pursh., *H. cylindrica* Dougl., and *H. parvifolia* Nutt., are well known by the hunters, prospectors and others who lead a wandering life. These plants are all very astringent and are successfully employed in cases of diarrhoea of all degrees of severity. This complaint is very troublesome and all the more so on account of its liability to occur at any time. This is particularly the case in alkali regions where the water one has to drink is so bad as to bring on this sickness in a few hours. Of course no drug stores are at hand, but by a little search one can usually find one or another of the species mentioned, *H. parvifolia* being the commonest species in Northern Montana. Any one troubled with the complaint mentioned can, by chewing a small portion of the root and swallowing the juice, quickly relieve himself. Or where the dried root is used, some people carrying a supply wherever they go, a decoction is often made, but is very disagreeable to take. The great trouble with alum root is that if one takes only a little too much sudden constipation comes on and has been known to last for days, often causing dangerous symptoms.

We have tried several native roots at different times while far away from human habitations and have found that the root of *Mitella pentandra* Hook. is far superior to alum root. It is milder and slower in its action and besides being mildly astringent possesses a bitter principle which acts as an appetizer, as we have demonstrated to our perfect satisfaction